DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 212 003 CS 503 705

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TITLE The Influence of Teacher and Student Gender on Grading in the Basic Public Speaking and Interpersonal Communication Courses.
PUB DATE Nov 81
NOTE 23p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Speech Communication Association (67th, Anaheim, CA, November 12-15, 1981).

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Academic Achievement; College Students; Communication Research; *Educational Research; Females; *Grades (Scholastic); *Grading; Higher Education; Males; Public Speaking; *Sex Differences; Speech Communication; *Speech Curriculum; Student Evaluation
IDENTIFIERS Interpersonal Communication

ABSTRACT

A study examined the effects of gender on academic achievement in speech communication courses. In order to test the research hypothesis that females would receive higher grades than males, 2,190 grades given by 74 speech communication teachers over a five-year period were examined. The analysis of variance placed gender of the instructor, gender of the student, and type of course (public speaking or interpersonal communication) as the dependent variables, while course grade was the independent variable. The results showed that females received higher grades than males, regardless of the course in which they were enrolled. The type of course did not yield significantly different grading patterns, nor did female and male instructors appear to grade in a significantly different manner. However, further examination of the trends in the analysis of variance indicated that male instructors tended to grade slightly lower than female instructors in both kinds of classes, and that grades in the interpersonal communication course tended to be slightly higher than the grades in the public speaking course. (RL)

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THE INFLUENCE OF TEACHER AND STUDENT GENDER ON GRADING IN THE BASIC PUBLIC SPEAKING AND INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION COURSES

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Presented at the annual meeting of the Speech Communication Association: Anaheim, California, November, 1981.

CS503705

Meeting the student's basic communication needs is one of the traditional and fundamental goals of the basic speech communication course. Students in the basic public speaking course learn to analyze, organize, outline, introduce, summarize, and reason. Students in the basic interpersonal communication course learn about self-concept, self-disclosure, active listening, empathic understanding, perceptual differences, assertive communication, and relationship development.

The public speaking course, as the more traditional of the two courses, has been more carefully scrutinized. The course has been thoroughly described in regularly completed surveys (Dedmon, 1965; Dedmon & Frandsen, 1965; Hargis, 1956; Jones, 1955; London, 1963, 1964; Gibson, Kline & Gruner, 1974; Lohr, 1974; Gibson, Gruner, Brooks, & Petrie, 1970; and Gibson Gruner, Hanna, Smythe, and Hayes, 1980; Pearson, Sorenson, & Nelson, 1981; Sorenson & Pearson, 1981). Grading in the public speaking course has been similarly scrutinized (Barker, 1966; Bock, Powell, Kitchens, & Flavin, 1976; Bryan & Wilke, 1942; Hayes, 1977; Mulac & Sherman, 1975, Pearson, 1975, 1980b, 1981a; Sprague, 1971).

Interpersonal communication as a basic speech communication course is a relatively recent development. Consequently the course has not been examined in the same detail as the basic public speaking course. A recent survey offered descriptive information on the course (Berryman & Weaver, 1979). Another study (Pearson & Yoder, 1980) considered the differences in

Other research demonstrates no difference in the criticism given by male and female evaluators: men and women are shown to be about equally lenient as evaluators (Bryan & Wilke, 1942); the evaluator's sex appears to have no significant bearing on identifying an appeal as emotional or intellectual or on judging persuasive content (Ruechelle, 1958); no sex differences are found among listeners in a study which considered the type of speech, the sex of the speaker, and the sex of the evaluator on the persuasibility of a speech (Bostrom & Kemp, 1968); no significant sex differences of the evaluator is demonstrated on persuasibility (Sloman, 1974); and no significant differences in the criticism patterns of male and female high school speech teachers are apparent (Pearson, 1980a). Therefore, we asked the following research question,

R_2: Do male and female instructors grade in a significantly different manner in the basic speech communication courses?

While some research has focused on the instructor's gender, another line of research has focused on the effect of the speaker's gender on his or her grade. These studies have suggested that women receive higher ratings than do men (Barker, 1966; Pearson, 1980b, 1981a); that female speakers appear to receive more positive comments than do male speakers, even when grades are held constant (Sprague, 1971; Pearson, 1975); and that female speakers obtain significantly higher scores on three dimensions of credibility--

trustworthiness, competence, and dynamism--than do male speakers (Vigliano, 1974). One study suggests that no difference appears in the persuasiveness of male and female speakers (Sloman, 1974).

Although limited in generalizability, a sizable body of literature in elementary education suggests a rationale for the difference in the grading of male and female students. Differential treatment of students by the teacher appears to occur on the basis of sex even when the male and female students have similar intellectual ability (Lobaugh, 1942; Swenson, 1942; Shinnerer, 1944; Carter, 1952). Teacher disapproval occurs more frequently with males than females (Lippit & Gold, 1959; de Grote & Thompson, 1949; Meyer & Thompson, 1956) and teachers are more likely to use a harsh tone when criticizing boys than girls (Spaulding, 1963; Waetjen, 1962). Student behavior, rather than student sex, explains differential treatment, on the elementary level, in recent studies (Davis & Slobodian, 1967; Jackson, Silberman, & Wolfson, 1969; Brophy & Good, 1970; Good & Brophy, 1971; Martin, 1972). High achieving males receive the most favorable teacher treatment while low achieving males receive the least favorable treatment (Good, Sikes, & Brophy, 1973). This finding contradicts, to some extent, the earlier suggestion that boys receive inferior treatment from teachers and suggests that earlier results were due to lack of categorization within each sex.

Researchers who have analyzed differences in grades for male and female public speaking students have similarly attempted to identify those behaviors which lead to higher grades. A low positive correlation occurs between verbal comprehension and general reasoning with speaking ability for male speakers, but no significant correlation exists for female subjects (Ball, 1958). Persons who are sexist appear to receive lower grades than do persons who are nonsexist (Pearson, 1981a).

A number of explanations can be posited for the higher grades that female students receive. Earlier research suggested that sexism might predict differential grading (Sprague, 1971; Pearson, 1975), but a recent study demonstrated that sexism has weak explanatory power (Pearson, 1980b). A second explanation is that female students may be more compliant than male students. A recent report suggests that persons who are sex-typed as feminine receive higher scores than do persons who are sex-typed as masculine and that compliance is a component of the feminine sex-role stereotype (Pearson, 1981a). A third possibility is that woman may receive higher scores than men in public speaking because women are more effective as public speakers (Pearson, 1981c). Whatever the explanation, the fact remains that women receive higher grades than do men in the basic public speaking course.

Women may be achieving higher grades in the basic interpersonal course as well. No study has systematically examined grading differences between male and female students in the basic interpersonal course, but some of the same rationale that has been used to explain sex differences in the grading in the basic public speaking course may be applied. The classroom setting which tends to reward compliance may be operative. In addition, women may be more effective at the interpersonal communication skills that provide the basis of grading in this course.

The interpersonal communication course in this study included the topics of perception, nonverbal and verbal codes, relationship development, the self-concept, communication models, and situational constraints. Students were evaluated on their skills in self-disclosure, self-awareness, assertiveness, active listening, empathy, and behavioral flexibility.

The stereotypical feminine personality characteristics which have been relied upon in recent research to create sex role instruments including the Bem Sex Role Inventory (Bem, 1974), the Personal Attributes Questionnaire (Spence, Helmreich, & Stapp, 1975) and Heilbrun's masculinity-femininity subscales (Heilbrun, 1976) include gentleness, sympathy, sensitivity to the needs of others, cheerfulness, understanding, compassion, and warmth. Stereotypical male characteristics which have been used in the development of the same instruments have included self-reliance, defending one's own beliefs, forcefulness,

analytic ability, dominance, and individualism. An examination of these opposing characteristics would suggest that women might be more successful at active listening, empathy, and behavioral flexibility while men might excel at self-disclosure and assertiveness.

The research in these areas, while sometimes sparse, generally supports these stereotypical notions. Feminine traits tend to reflect warmth and expressiveness (Gillen & Sherman, 1980) and females tend to be more loving toward other females while males tend to be least loving toward other males (Small, Gross, Erdwins, & Gessner, 1979). In interpersonal communication, men tend to pro-act while women tend to react (Strodtbeck & Mann, 1956). Women perceive themselves as more attentive in interpersonal communication (Talley & Richmond, 1980), and they have been repeatedly shown to be more sensitive to the cues that others have offered (cf., Argyle, Salter, Nicholson, Williams & Burgess, 1970; Rosenthal, Archer, Koivumaki, Di Matteo & Rogers, 1974).

Men are more active than are women in interpersonal communication exchanges. They talk more frequently, they talk for longer periods of time when they have the floor, and they interrupt others more than do women (cf. Kester, 1972; Zimmerman & West, 1975). Men order, command, interrogate and declare while women comply, acquiesce, reply and agree (cf. Eakins & Eakins, 1978). Males are generally rated higher on dynamism than are females (Widgery, 1974; Pearson, 1981b).

The literature generally supports, then, the notion that men are more assertive in interpersonal communication than are women.

Research on self-disclosure has not demonstrated conclusively that men engage in more self-disclosure than do women nor that they engage in more appropriate self-disclosure than women. Few studies suggest that males disclose more than females (Jourard & Friedman, 1970; Sermat & Smyth, 1973); some studies suggest that males and females engage in a similar amount of self-disclosure (cf. Graff, 1976; Hoffman-Graff, 1977; Thase & Page, 1977); but most demonstrate that females disclose more than males (cf. Gitter & Black, 1976; Dooley, Whalen & Flowers, 1978; Greenblatt, Hasenauer, & Freimuth, 1980). Men and women avoid self-disclosure for different reasons: men report that they avoid self-disclosure in order to maintain control over others and over situations while women report that they avoid self-disclosure in order to avoid personal and relational problems (Rosenfeld, 1979).

It appears, from this brief review of the literature, that women may be more successful at demonstrating interpersonal communication skills than are men. This generalization, added to the well-demonstrated finding that female students receive higher grades in the basic public speaking course than do male students, allows us to predict,

H_1: Females will receive higher grades in the basic interpersonal communication course and the basic public speaking course than will men.

METHOD

In order to test the research hypotheses, we examined the grades given over a five year period, Winter Quarter 1976 through Fall Quarter 1980, at a large midwestern university. This particular university offered two alternative basic courses --public speaking and interpersonal communication. Summer Sessions were excluded from the sample since summer school students may be different from students who enroll during the regular academic year and because course grades may vary from those given during the academic year. During the fifteen quarters that were included in this study (3 quarters for each of 5 years), 730 sections of public speaking or interpersonal communication were offered. Three hundred and sixty-seven of these sections were interpersonal communication and 363 sections were public speaking. Three grades were randomly selected from each section for a total of 2,190 grades. Seventy-four different instructors taught these 730 sections: 27 were female and 47 were male.

The 2 X 2 X 2 analysis of variance placed gender of the instructor (male or female), gender of the student (male or female) and type of course (public speaking or interpersonal communication) as the dependent variables. The independent variable was the course grade (A,B,C,D,F, or I). The results that follow are based on this analysis.

RESULTS

The results of this study demonstrate that females receive higher grades than do males, regardless of the course in which they are enrolled ($p < .00001$; see Table 1). The type of course--interpersonal communication or public speaking--does not yield significantly different grading patterns ($p = .10786$; see Table 1) nor do female and male instructors appear to grade in a significantly different manner ($p = .11732$; see Table 1). None of the interactions among the variables of interest were significant (see Table 1). Table 2 allows us to determine the direction of the trends that are suggested in the analysis of variance. For instance, male instructors tend to grade slightly lower than do female instructors in both interpersonal communication and public speaking, and the grades in the interpersonal communication course tend to be slightly higher than the grades in the public speaking course.

DISCUSSION

The hypothesis, that female students would receive higher grades than males in either basic course, was confirmed. Women received an average grade of 1.958 and men receive an average grade of 2.213 on a scale in which 1=A, 2=B, and 3=C. The first research question which asked whether grades in the basic interpersonal course were significantly different from the grades in the basic public speaking course could not be answered affirmatively, although a trend suggests that

the grades in the interpersonal communication course are slightly higher (mean=2.065) than the grades in the public speaking course (mean=2.120). The second research question which asked whether male or female instructors grade in a significantly different manner could not be answered affirmatively, although a trend suggests that male instructors grade slightly lower (mean=2.122) than do female instructors (mean=2.053) in the basic courses.

The consistent finding that female students receive higher grades than male students was again demonstrated in this study. We may be no closer to an explanation for this finding than we have been in the past; nonetheless, it is critical that we are able to demonstrate this conclusion in courses which encompass a variety of communication contexts. Women receive higher scores in public speaking courses and in interpersonal communication courses, at the basic course level. Other researchers may examine the grading patterns in different kinds of basic courses-- the small group discussion course, the interviewing course, and the combination or hybrid course. In our own effort to examine differential grading and to determine a rationale with explanatory power, we will next compare a skills-oriented course with a basic course which is theoretical in orientation. We might then be able to draw some conslusions about the relative importance of the cognitive and behavioral domains in explaining gender differences in the basic course. At the present time we cannot be certain if differential grading patterns are a result of the classroom

situation or the ability to effectuate specific communication competencies; however, we can be relatively certain that women receive higher grades than do men in the basic public speaking course and in the basic interpersonal communication course.

Table 1 -- Analysis of Variance for the Variables of Interest

Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	df	F	Significance
Within Cells	1514.27	2182		
Course	1.70	1	2.46	.11732
Instructor Gender	1.80	1	2.59	.10786
Student Gender	34.31	1	49.45	.00001**
Course X Instructor Gender	.21	1	.30	.58360
Course X Student Gender	.07	1	.10	.75576
Instructor Gender X Student Gender	.16	1	.22	.63566
Course X Instructor Gender X Student Gender	.85	1	1.22	.26926

**Highly Significant

Table 2--Means and Standard Deviations for the Variables of Interest

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation	# of Subjects
Interpersonal Communication			
Male Instructors			
Male Students	2.288	.978	233
Female Students	1.964	.840	277
Female Instructors			
Male Students	2.144	.874	257
Female Students	1.931	.837	334
Public Speaking			
Male Instructors			
Male Students	2.221	.808	430
Female Students	1.997	.766	299
Female Instructors			
Male Students	2.200	.805	235
Female Students	1.920	.679	125
Total Sample	2.092	.842	2190

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